

PRESIDENTIAL CALL TAPED

Secret Testimony Gives Glimpses of CIA's World

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WASHINGTON—“We do not forge American passports,” said William E. Colby, head of the Central Intelligence Agency. “Sometimes we have a passport in alias, but it is a genuine passport.”

Such fine distinctions are part of the CIA's world, previously secret congressional testimony shows.

It is a world where agents sometimes disguise themselves to interview other U.S. citizens and where former CIA Director Richard M. Helms once secretly tape-recorded private instructions from President Lyndon B. Johnson to make sure he understood what Johnson was saying, according to transcripts of closed hearings that were examined by The Times.

Agency officials spoke of the “gray area” of domestic intelligence and of the need to strengthen the CIA's authority to investigate leaks of national security information, the hearing records show.

In these Senate and House sessions in 1973 and 1974, CIA officials talked about reacting to White House pressures but said the agency had never been pushed into illegal actions.

The records examined by The Times were of closed hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 14 and 17, 1973, and before the Intelligence Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on March 7, 1974.

CIA officials were questioned on these dates about their actions in relation to the Watergate scandal. They denied anything but a peripheral connection to the case but gave other insights into agency operations.

Nowhere, however, did they disclose what Colby and his predecessor, Defense Secretary James R. Schlesin-

ger, have since acknowledged — that the agency had gathered intelligence on U.S. dissidents and had infiltrated antiwar groups, apparently in violation of its charter.

One example of pressures was given by Helms.

In closed meetings last March with the House Subcommittee and in 1973 with the Senate committee, Helms said that Presidents Johnson and Richard M. Nixon occasionally had called him to demand information.

“The pressure was applied on us from time to time on various things, such as weapons estimates and things of that kind,” he told the senators, according to the transcript.

“This town, if I may say so, is no picnic. And there were various times when pressures were applied for this.”

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that or the other things—what about this bombing report, why doesn't it say this rather than that, and so forth. But I don't recall any of that kind . . . having to do with domestic aspects."

Demands from Johnson once became so great that Helms secretly tape-recorded the President's instructions in hopes of understanding them better, the former CIA director told the House subcommittee. He said he could push a button on his CIA office phone to record a conversation and could activate other bugging devices to record conferences in his office and in an adjoining room.

In describing the Johnson incident, for which he gave no date, Helms said:

"I do recall at one time having a very active conversation with President Johnson about a whole lot of things he wanted me to do about Vietnam, and my finally, in desperation, pushing this button in order to get straight what he was trying to tell me to do."

Helms told the congressmen that he did not recall ever recording conversations with Mr. Nixon.

His phone tapes, he said, no longer exist because they were regularly erased after a transcript was typed by his secretary. Helms said he used the device only occasionally and customarily tore up the transcripts after they had served his purpose.

He said he had recorded about 30 office conversations from 1965 until he departed as director in February, 1973. He acknowledged having destroyed the conversations in January, 1973, shortly after Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) had asked him in writing to preserve any Watergate-related tapes and doc-

uments. But Helms insisted none of the conversations had dealt with Watergate.

Although the White House frequently demanded information, those lines of communication were not mutual, Helms hinted. Although former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt Jr. was a personal acquaintance of his, Helms said, the agency had not been informed before the White House wired Hunt as a consultant in the summer of 1971.

"This struck me as odd," Helms said, although he added that Hunt's record was a good one. He said Hunt, a 20-year employee of the CIA, once had received and paid back a large interest-free loan from a CIA affiliate known as the Public Service Aid Society.

This organization, funded by voluntary contributions from CIA agents, is used to aid financially distressed employees, Helms explained. At the time, Hunt's daughter was undergoing psychiatric treatment after an auto accident, he said.

Hunt later became part of the White House "Plumbers" intelligence unit—which Helms said he had not known about—and eventually was convicted of conspiracy in the Watergate break-in.

Colby, in the still-classified Senate transcript of May, 1973, talked about CIA disguises after contending that the agency had lent Hunt a wig and other devices in good faith in 1971.

When asked whether disguises were ever used in this country, Colby replied affirmatively.

"There are situations," he said, "in which we want to hire an individual to be an agent abroad. We want him to go ahead with no apparent connection with the CIA in some other cover."

"We want to investigate that gen-

tleman. We want to find out what kind of background he has. We do not want anyone going around with the name CIA because that would immediately alert the people to whom he is talking."

Thus, many domestic interviews are conducted by agents posing as private investigators, sometimes wearing wigs or false glasses, he told the committee.

Interviews with foreign sources in this country often are conducted in the same manner, Colby testified.

"If there was a foreigner in the United States who we wanted to try to develop as an agent for use abroad," Colby said, "it might well be that we would want to conduct that relationship under a false identity, so if it went bad he could not publicly denounce and criticize the U.S. for having tried to recruit him."

Schlesinger said it was "legal for a CIA employee to approach an American citizen or others in disguise for the purpose of fulfilling the DCI's (director's) responsibility to protect sources and methods."

"But this is a gray area because of the other aspects," he added, referring to the National Security Act of 1947, which provides that the CIA shall not engage in domestic spying on Americans.

On the same point, Helms recommended that the agency be empowered to investigate domestic cases, especially where leaks of national security information have occurred. This area presently is reserved by law to the FBI.

It was to assist in an investigation four years ago of Daniel Ellsberg's leak of the Pentagon Papers that the CIA furnished disguises to Hunt along with a psychiatric profile of Ellsberg.

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